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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [OVIP](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: NEMTSOV, MILOV: OBAMA MUST SHOW SUPPORT FOR
MEDVEDEV, PRESS ON CENSORSHIP

REF: A. MOSCOW 789
[B](#). MOSCOW 988
[C](#). MOSCOW 1091

Classified By: Ambassador John R. Beyrle for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: In a June 3 meeting, former Deputy Prime Minister Boris Nemtsov and former Deputy Energy Minister Vladimir Milov -- co-leaders of the Solidarity opposition movement -- outlined for the Ambassador how President Obama should approach his July visit to Moscow. First, they argued, Obama should send a signal to Russia's political elite by demonstrating clear support and encouragement for Medvedev while minimizing interactions with PM Putin. Second, the President should not ignore human rights for the sake of building trust on other issues, which Russian leaders would interpret as U.S. weakness. Third, rather than raise a litany of issues from Khodorkovskiy to Chechnya, Obama should broach a single priority -- ending censorship -- and frame it as a broader rule of law issue that would also decrease corruption. Nemtsov described his recent experience running for mayor of Sochi, which provided important lessons on provocations and fraud that Solidarity expects to see repeated in the March 2010 Moscow City elections. End Summary.

Advice for Obama: Support Medvedev to Build His Stature

[1](#)2. (C) In a June 3 meeting, former Deputy Prime Minister Boris Nemtsov and former Deputy Energy Minister Vladimir Milov -- co-leaders of the Solidarity opposition movement -- outlined for the Ambassador how they believed President Obama should approach his July visit to Moscow. They recommended that he clearly demonstrate support and encouragement for Medvedev over Putin. Nemtsov described Obama and Putin as having "entirely different value systems," making Obama's relationship with Medvedev -- a fellow lawyer -- all the more important. Milov stressed that it will be important for the political elite to see the President spending a lot of time with Medvedev, which would boost Medvedev's international stature and personal confidence at a time when polls show only 12 percent of Russians believe Medvedev holds the true reins of power. "Medvedev wants to be the president," Nemtsov explained, but he lacks the fortitude to assert himself or to make his mark as head of state; "Obama can help Medvedev find his (fortitude)."

Human Rights: Don't Lecture, Focus First on Censorship

[1](#)3. (C) Discussing how Obama should broach human rights, Nemtsov and Milov stressed that he should eschew "the lectures of President Bush." On the other hand, Milov warned, Obama should not set aside human rights for the sake of building trust on post-START and other security issues. Instead, he should "demonstrate to Medvedev that Russia has

choices to make, and that these choices have consequences if Russia wishes to fully integrate into the community of civilized nations." Avoiding "soft issues" would be a mistake, Nemtsov argued, since "Russian leaders only understand strengths" and would perceive the omission of human rights discussions as a concession.

¶4. (C) Nemtsov recommended that Obama relate to Medvedev as a fellow lawyer, stressing the importance of the rule of law and his belief that Medvedev wants and needs to be the protector of the Russian constitution. Further, Nemtsov advised that the President should focus on just one human rights priority with Medvedev rather than muddy the discussion with a farrago of issues such as the trial of Mikhail Khodorkovskiy, Chechnya, or elections. Ending censorship should be that one issue, Nemtsov argued, which Obama could frame as an important step for both enhancing the rule of law and helping to fight corruption.

Solidarity Looks to 2010 Moscow Elections, Expects Fraud

¶5. (C) Nemtsov described his losing bid to win Sochi's mayoral race in April as a preview of the fraud that political opposition will endure in future elections. Unable to compete in national or regional-level elections, unregistered parties such as Solidarity have limited their ambitions to local races. Milov and Nemtsov predicted that the media censorship, early voting abuses, and "anti-Nemtsov black PR" that vexed their Sochi campaign would recur in Moscow. (See reftels re: the Sochi race and reported electoral fraud. Nemtsov told us his appeal of the result is

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ongoing.) Since Moscow requires candidates to collect signatures to run in city elections, Nemtsov added that he expects electoral commissions will disqualify Solidarity candidates by tampering with their submitted signatures and petitions.

¶6. (C) Despite such looming difficulties, Nemtsov pointed to frictions between the federal and Moscow governments that might redound to Solidarity's benefit. For example, he said that Kremlin Deputy Chief of Staff Vladislav Surkov wants to promote the new Kremlin-friendly Right Cause party, while Moscow mayor Yuriy Luzhkov does not because he hates its party patron, Anatoliy Chubais. Milov explained that Solidarity intends to run Milov, Ilya Yashin, and possibly Garry Kasparov for the 15 single-mandate seats on the Moscow City Duma. Describing Solidarity's prospects, Milov explained that different candidates would appeal to different demographics. Kasparov, for example, is popular with the intelligentsia but not with businesspeople. Milov and Nemtsov, according to their own assessment, are popular with businesspeople.

Comment

¶7. (C) Liberal opposition leaders recognize that their hopes for returning to the national political arena have vanished, leading them to grudgingly accept Medvedev as the lesser of two evils in the leadership tandem. In a May 26 meeting, Right Cause party leader Leonid Gozman echoed Nemtsov's comments about Medvedev's unassertive character when he remarked that "Medvedev is a little boy compared to Putin." Gozman reckoned that Medvedev has until 2011 to come into his own as president, otherwise Putin would easily retake his old job and stay in office until 2024. We agree with Nemtsov and Milov on the boost to Medvedev's stature that a successful summit meeting with the President can provide, but note that few here believe that U.S.-Russian relations can advance without Putin's support and engagement.

BEYRLE